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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 001280

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/10/2012
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [HO](#)
SUBJECT: TFH01: ZELAYA'S ABORTED DEPARTURE FROM HONDURAS

REF: A. TEGUCIGALPA 1270
[1](#)B. TEGUCIGALPA 1250

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Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens for reasons 1.4 (b & d)

[1](#)1. (S) Summary: President Jose Manuel "Mel" Zelaya told the Ambassador late on the afternoon of December 9 that he had obtained safe passage out of Honduras from the de facto regime and would depart that evening on an airplane provided by Mexican President Felipe Calderon and be given "guest of honor" status. However, according to the Mexican Charge, the de facto regime reneged on the original agreement and, at the last minute, insisted that Zelaya request asylum. Zelaya worsened the situation by denouncing the request in a media interview. The GOM was angered by its treatment by the regime, particularly as a plane it sent to pick up Zelaya was rerouted twice and then told to leave Honduran airspace as it ran low on fuel. The proposed safe passage for Zelaya was poorly managed by all involved, including the Mexicans, the Brazilians, the regime and Zelaya. Paradoxically, Zelaya's departure from Honduras would be advantageous on a human level for him and his family. In addition, it would somewhat defuse the tension that Zelaya's situation in the Brazilian Embassy has generated since Zelaya's unexpected September 21 return to the country. Finally, it would have facilitated dialogue between Zelaya and president-elect Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo and possibly made it easier for the international community to convince de facto regime leader Roberto Micheletti to relinquish power and allow formation of a unity government as called for by the Tegucigalpa-San Jose Accord. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (S) President Jose Manuel "Mel" Zelaya called the Ambassador on December 9 around 16:00 to inform us that the de facto regime had granted him safe passage out of Honduras. President Zelaya said Mexican President Felipe Calderon had offered to send an airplane to Honduras to fly him out on December 9. President Zelaya said he wanted to make the U.S. aware of his plan and wanted to know if the U.S. opposed it. The Ambassador replied that the U.S. did not, and that this was his decision to make. Zelaya also expressed concern about his security during his planned departure. President Zelaya told the Ambassador that he would be accompanied to Mexico by the First Lady, Xiomara Castro Zelaya, his daughter, Xiomara Hortensia "Pichu" Zelaya; his son, Jose Manuel Zelaya; and his advisor, Rasel Tome. Zelaya said President Calderon would declare him and those accompanying

him "distinguished guests of honor" and that they would be allowed to remain in Mexico as long as they wanted. President Zelaya told the Ambassador that he would call President of Costa Rica Oscar Arias and President of the Dominican Republic Leonel Fernandez and promised to call the Ambassador if possible before his departure. Zelaya stated that he remained committed to reaching a deal with president-elect Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo even after his departure from Honduras (reftel A).

13. (S) The agreement began to break down in the early evening as news of President Zelaya's imminent departure began to leak out. According to Mexican Charge Carlos Torres, who spoke separately several times with the Ambassador and DCM, de facto regime officials reneged on an agreement to allow Zelaya safe passage, instead insisting that he request political asylum. Torres, who was in the Honduran foreign ministry in the late afternoon and evening, said the tone there noticeably changed around the same time as control over the issue was taken over by Micheletti personal advisor Roberto Turcios, away from the MFA officials with who Torres had been working up to that point. Torres said that Turcios was extremely rude and arrogant. Torres said that he understood that in return for allowing Zelaya to leave the country, the ministry had unexpectedly asked Zelaya to sign a document accepting the December 2 vote in Congress not to restore him to the presidency. Zelaya then gave a press interview denouncing the de facto regime for requiring him to sign a document requesting political asylum.

14. (S) Torres said that the GOM was insulted by its treatment by the de factos. Besides the fact that the de factos reneged on their promise to the GOM to grant Zelaya safe passage (without conditions), Torres said that the treatment of the GOM plane, sent to pick up Zelaya, had caused anger in

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Mexico City. The plane, which was carrying Mexican SRE Subsecretario Salvador Beltran, had been diverted from Tegucigalpa to San Pedro Sula one hour before its scheduled arrival and then, as it approached San Pedro Sula, "ordered" out of Honduran airspace. He said that the plane's lack of fuel had caused concern onboard the aircraft, which opted to fly to San Salvador. Torres reported the morning of December 10 that the plane was returning to Mexico. He said that the given the actions of the de facto regime, the GOM would no longer press ("insistir") for Zelaya's departure.

15. (S) The governments of Mexico and Brazil did not inform the USG of the discussions and plans to fly Zelaya out of Honduras until they began to break down. They also failed to inform Central American governments, including President of Costa Rica Oscar Arias. Once the plan collapsed, the Mexican and Brazilian Charge d'Affaires reached out to the U.S. to try to cobble it back together again. The Ambassador told Torres that the USG "was unhappy" about not being informed of the plan beforehand and urged the GOM to continue to support the Tegucigalpa-San Jose Accord; the DCM passed a similar message to the Brazilian Charge.

16. (S) Comment: It appears that de facto hard-liners successfully scuttled Zelaya's departure by changing the terms that had been negotiated with the GOM and Zelaya. Zelaya further worsened the situation with an interview publicly blasting the regime, instead of seeking a diplomatic way to pressure them to go back to their original agreement. President Zelaya's departure would have been positive for several reasons. First of all, from a human and practical point of view, it would have improved the living conditions of the President and his wife, who have been living around the clock at the Brazilian Chancery and sleeping on sofas for almost three months since his return to the country on September 21. Zelaya and his family would have been able to enjoy the Christmas season in a tranquil atmosphere with freedom of movement. Zelaya's presence at the Brazilian Embassy, located in the heart of the Honduran capital, casts

a long psychological shadow over his countrymen, both those who oppose and fear him and those who support him. His departure would have somewhat lessened this tension for Hondurans as this now polarized society comes together with their family members to celebrate Christmas and New Year. It would also have eased bilateral tensions between Brazil and Honduras, and potentially contributed to a more constructive approach on Honduras by Brazil and several non-ALBA countries in South America.

¶17. (S) Comment Continued: Zelaya's departure would also have facilitated his dialogue with president-elect Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo and the possibility that a deal could be reached between them restoring the constitutional order before Lobo takes office on January 27, 2009. There have been preliminary communications between Zelaya and Lobo, but Lobo is unwilling to meet with Zelaya in the Brazilian Embassy due to security concerns. However, Lobo has said that he would meet with Zelaya in any country other than Nicaragua.

¶18. (S) Comment Continued: Finally, Zelaya's departure might have facilitated the relinquishment of power by de facto regime leader Roberto Micheletti. Micheletti has repeatedly stated that he would step down if Zelaya also did so. The Congress voted on December 2, pursuant to the Tegucigalpa-San Jose Accord, not to reinstate Zelaya to the office of president (reftel B). If Zelaya were physically out of Honduras, Micheletti would have little excuse to hang on to power and efforts to have him step aside and permit the creation of a national unity government, as called for by the Tegucigalpa-San Jose Accord, might have a greater chance of success.

LLORENS